

Umnoputraism : are you for or against?
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For the first time, there appears to be a clear-cut battle line between the opposition parties - PAS, DAP and PKR – and the ruling Barisan Nasional in the coming election.
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Reading through the manifestos of the opposition parties, they seem to have said in one voice: no more racial politics please, let us get on with real nation-building by restoring the democratic rights as enshrined in our constitution to all citizens, irrespective of race or creed.

Whereas BN says: we have done well in the past 50 years, let us maintain the status quo. This means Umno will continue its hegemony which is characterised by abrogation of democracy, impaired rule of law, pervasive racism, rampant corruption, abuse of power, religious intolerance, uncontrollable crime rate and runaway inflation.

Of these evils that are plaguing this country, what has captured the attention of the electorate most are the ones that have inflicted personal pain to the common people - the unbearable price hikes and the equally unbearable crime rates. So, let us zero in on these two issues.

Crime rates have been spiraling uncontrollably in recent years due to two main factors - a thoroughly corrupted and incompetent police force and absentee ministerial oversight under the Internal Security Minister cum Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. A corrupt police force is the natural product of a corrupt political leadership. It doesn't make sense any way for a corrupt political leadership to maintain a clean and competent force, for the latter, if truly uncorrupted, would surely put the former in trouble. That is why the proposed Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC) will never be implemented as long as Umno is in power. And that is also why crime rate will not come down over the next five years if Umno is returned to power.

What about inflation? BN has a point when it says that local prices are affected by escalation of world prices of commodities. But why are Singaporeans, who are even more affected by world commodity price escalations than us, do not cry out in such pain as Malaysians? Shouldn't Singapore, which produces no primary commodity at all, suffer more than Malaysia, which is a major exporter of primary commodities?

First, Singapore has been enjoying robust economic growth while Malaysia has not, despite BN's claim to the contrary. The vast majority of Malaysians, who have been struggling to make ends meet, can hardly stay above the water under the recent price spirals. Second, Malaysia's notorious income disparity, which is already worst in the region, has further worsened under Umnoputraism – the policy of favouritism enjoyed by Umno elites and cronies, resulting in a vast majority being deprived of equitable share of the nation's wealth. Third, unreasonable hikes in costs of services – road tolls, electricity, water, telecommunications etc – due to one-sided agreements and monopolies favouring crony enterprises to the detriment of consumers. Fourth, we have a corrupted and inept administration that has lost its moral authority to impose discipline on traders, many of whom have obviously indulged in profiteering.

It will be seen that, as all roads lead to Rome, all these evils could be traced to one root cause – racism. It is through racism that Umno is able to maintain its hegemony through racial divide and rule. While in power, it amends the constitution and enacts laws that abrogate democracy in a continuous process that eventually have allowed it to have amassed immense autocratic power over the executive. It manipulates the democratic institutions – the judiciary, the Attorney-General's Chambers, the police, the ACA, the Election commission, the civil service, etc - to serve the parochial interests of the party.

Through these manipulations, the ruling elite have pursued its illegitimate interests with impunity, such as amassing illegal wealth and crushing down on political dissents. As a result, racism and corruption have run unabated, devastating the nation to an untenable level in a dictatorial ambience. Apart from causing the worst racial polarisation and 'brain drain' through intensifying racial discrimination, Umnoputraism has also seriously undermined the integrity and efficiency of the entire government machinery through uninhibited corruption. In particular, our judiciary is held in scorn, and the quality of education continues its unrelenting slide.

Our international competitiveness have slipped from the top strata to the bottom rank in the region, and we're not favoured by foreign and local investors alike. A most worrisome indicator is the slip of Malaysia's export growth to the bottom in the region for 2007 (The Star, Nov 29, 2007). In a year (2007) when global economy expanded strongly and primary commodity prices surged, Malaysia should have enjoyed admirable export growth and economic boom since it is a major exporter of primary commodities and a net petroleum exporter. Then why are the people groaning of economic hardship amidst rising costs of living and declining quality of life?

Hong Kong and Singapore have no natural resources whatsoever, and yet they are reaping bountiful budget surpluses and distributing generous cash to their citizens. In contrast, Malaysia is richly endowed with natural resources and yet it has to struggle to prop up its economy through ten consecutive years of heavy budget-deficit spending. No rational person should deny that Malaysia has been badly mismanaged. And the culprit is Umno's racist and corrupt politics.

On the eve of election, Umno may be satisfied that it will continue to be cuddled by its core supporters. This feeling has no doubt been buttressed by the anticipated goodwill it has gained through the recent hefty wage increment it gave to the 1.2 million government employees and the unprecedented commodity price boom enjoyed by Felda settlers who are spread all over the country. But these people must be reminded that their unusual benefits may be transient, as such hefty wage increments are a one-off affair, and commodity prices are subject to cyclical changes.

Only a clean and competent political leadership can extricate the nation from the present quagmire and bring long term prosperity to its entire people. Malaysians of all races must now decide whether they want the present racial fragmentation to continue for another five years under Umno, with all the collateral vices intact. Or they want to give a fresh start to the nation by boldly embracing genuine multi-racialism to restore democracy and good government to the people.

In short, the vote to be cast on Saturday should be treated as a verdict on Umnoputraism: for or against?

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